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U.S. DOT Proposes \$1 Million Civil Penalty Against Pipeline Company for Possible Violations in Fatal Louisiana Accident

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Transportation today announced that its Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) is proposing more than a \$1 million civil penalty against the Marathon Pipe Line Company after an investigation into the March 2009 pipeline failure at the St. James Terminal in Vacherie, Louisiana. One welder was killed and three other workers were injured when hazardous vapors in a crude oil sump ignited during maintenance.

“The Department’s top priority is safety,” said U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood. “The agency will hold pipeline operators accountable for protecting the health, welfare, and safety of their workers.”

PHMSA’s investigation uncovered possible failures by Marathon to institute and follow required procedures to safely and effectively perform maintenance activities, report previous accidents and take actions to prevent the occurrence of such accidents, and use qualified and drug-tested personnel.

“It is essential that pipeline operators follow safety regulations when conducting maintenance and operational procedures to mitigate safety risks to their workers and the surrounding public,” said PHMSA Administrator Cynthia L. Quarterman. “Proposing and assessing civil penalties is a key component of our oversight mission.”

In addition to the proposed violation notice and associated fines, PHMSA issued a proposed Compliance Order to Marathon that would require the company to submit the requested reports, develop procedures, and properly qualify company workers.

Pipeline operators are allowed up to 30 days to respond to allegations included in a Notice of Probable Violation or, after review PHMSA could conclude the allegations to be facts and issue a Final Order without further notice. To learn more about PHMSA’s enforcement tools and processes, visit the agency’s enforcement page on its Stakeholders Communications website at <http://primis.phmsa.dot.gov/comm>.

PHMSA’s pipeline safety inspectors and its state partners are committed to ensuring the safety of America’s pipeline transportation system and will continue to carefully monitor the activities of Marathon Pipe Line Company.

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